

Spy's access clear despite his record

By Nicholas M. Horrock
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WASHINGTON—Key Reagan administration officials said that admitted spy Jonathan Jay Pollard managed to maintain one of the United States' top security clearances despite a history of psychiatric difficulties that caused the Navy at one point to suspend his access to national defense secrets.

According to these sources, who are very familiar with the eight-month investigation that last week resulted in Pollard pleading guilty to charges of spying for Israel, the 31-year-old Navy intelligence analyst's case is perhaps the most glaring example in recent years of a U.S. security breakdown.

The Navy has publicly acknowledged that Pollard's security clearance was suspended in 1981 for "bizarre behavior," but restored in the same year. Navy spokesmen have refused to comment further on the case.

But other government sources said that naval investigators identified psychiatric difficulties both before and after Pollard became a civilian employee of the Navy in 1979, and that despite this evidence he obtained a clearance in 1983 that gave him access to "special compartmentalized information," a higher level of access than "top secret."

Pollard's behavior in 1981—outbursts so serious that co-workers reported them, one source said—caused him to be removed from one of his Navy assignments, but did not deter the Navy from later assigning him to

a highly sensitive counterterrorism organization at a Suitland, Md., facility.

"This background [of psychiatric problems] should have been taken into consideration in his security clearance," said one official who asked not to be identified by name or title. Another called "murky" the question of how Pollard passed what should have been extensive screening for the clearances. "This is under review," one source said.

Pollard's unsuitability for a security assignment is only one of several issues still under investigation in the sweeping Israeli espionage operation uncovered by Pollard's arrest Nov. 21 outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

Pollard and his wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, pleaded guilty to criminal charges and are cooperating with American authorities in the continuing inquiry by a federal grand jury here. American officials said the Pollard case was a major Israeli intelligence operation, authorized at high levels and aimed at getting information about Arab states and American weapons that the U.S. wouldn't sell them.

These are the key elements of the continuing investigation, according to these sources:

● Israel will be asked to punish members of its intelligence service who violated American law and unwritten agreements between the two countries by using Pollard to obtain suitcases full of American

intelligence documents. Though U.S. officials have not ruled out indicting and attempting to prosecute Israeli citizens, the problem is complicated because a team of American officials that had investigated the case in Israel had granted immunity to several Israeli officials who gave them information.

● The possibility has not been ruled out that additional American citizens may be prosecuted as the inquiry into the espionage case widens. One source called this a "very sensitive issue," but would not deny there is information in the case implicating additional Americans.

● The Defense Department has begun an internal review of how Pollard's security clearance was handled, and the effort to assess the damage of his spying still is incomplete. The U.S. is seeking further help from the Israelis on what Pollard gave them in order to complete this assessment.

What has concerned Justice Department and FBI officials involved in the case is the number of warning signals about Pollard's unsuitability for a security clearance that were available to Department of Defense investigators who conducted the screening. Pollard is one of some 4.3 million Americans who hold security clearances, and his background investigation was conducted by civilian employees of the department.

Numerous government officials have admitted in the past several years that many of the reviews are shoddy and perfunctory. One senior Naval official argues that counterintelligence in the armed forces has totally disintegrated.

During his college years at Stanford University and his graduate studies in Boston, Pollard, who was born and raised in the U.S., often told associates that he was an operative of Israeli intelligence and in several instances described himself as being a "colonel" in the Israeli armed forces.

He also claimed, according to press interviews, that he spied for the Pakistanis and East Germans. Many associates have said he seemed to live in a "fantasy" world and was mesmerized by the world of espionage. He told people that he had undergone military training in Israel. This information was available to Navy investigators, these sources said, but not considered.

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At the same time that the Defense Department is reviewing how Pollard got his clearance, Justice and FBI officials are continuing with the criminal espionage investigation. They want to interview Israeli Air Force Gen. Aviem "Avi" Sella, who has been described as the key agent in recruiting Pollard.

In 1984, Sella, then a colonel, was attending New York University graduate school. Pollard met him through an American citizen who has not been publicly identified. In December, 1985, a team of U.S. lawyers went to Israel to investigate the case and the Israelis pledged full cooperation.

They permitted American officials to interview several other Israelis who had been dealing with Pollard in the U.S. but did not explain Sella's role, and he was not interviewed. Those Israelis interviewed were given commitments that they would not be prosecuted for what they said.

After Pollard and his wife began cooperating with investigators and other information became available, it was clear to American lawmen that the Israelis had not been totally forthcoming about the operation. "It was not that they misled us in the positive sense ... that they gave us false information," one official said. "It was what they didn't tell us.

"They failed and failed terribly in not vigorously investigating the matter as the prime minister [Shimon Peres] had promised," this source said.

Israeli officials now are trying to persuade the U.S. that Sella "didn't know anything about the case," and that his testimony will not be helpful.